

# **The City of Edinburgh Council declares a housing emergency**

**The City of Edinburgh Council has declared a housing emergency which is, at least in part, a call to The Scottish Government for more financial support.**

**On any one night in the Scottish capital there are around 5,000 households who must resort to living in temporary accommodation. This does not mean rough sleepers, but families or individuals who do not have a permanent home.**

Cllr Jane Meagher is the Housing Convener on The City of Edinburgh Council. She said: "I'm just so thrilled that this has got almost unanimous support from across all of the five parties in the council. But I'm also disheartened because it reminds me of the scale of the challenge we've got."

The Housing Convener is convinced that the council knows how to resolve the problems, but needs the means and resources to achieve that. She said: "We've been very successful in preventing homelessness, we've been very successful in getting people supported into accommodation so that they don't get

into the revolving door where a tenancy collapses, for example. We work in very close partnership with the voluntary sector, with registered social landlords and with The Scottish Government, and between us, we know what the solutions are.”

Cllr Tim Pogson who seconded the administration motion pointed out how slow the system is (on average). He said: “Households in Edinburgh today who are moving into the temporary accommodation having been made homeless – that means they’ll be moving out to the next permanent accommodation hopefully on January 4th. But that is not January the fourth as in a couple of months time, which might seem fairly reasonable, but January 4th of the following year – 2025.”

Cllr Stuart Dobbin said that the message from Shelter when they delivered a deputation earlier in the day to the council was very powerful. The written version of that deputation is copied below. Cllr Kevin Lang said he was also very taken with the deputation from Alison at Shelter. He said: “Alison challenged us to think and do things differently. And my big hope is that in the work that comes forward now we do try to think and do things differently.”

Cllr Ben Parker said: “I would encourage members to read the answers to my written questions submitted to today’s meeting. It wasn’t planned but the questions and answers that I’ve received, I think really do reinforce the message of this question.”

SNP Housing and Homelessness spokesperson Cllr David Key said after the decision: “SNP councillors fully support declaring a housing emergency. We heard a stark picture from Shelter and other organisations.

“Shamefully thousands of children are in temporary accommodation, some of which is unsuitable. It’s scandalous that more than half of the children in temporary accommodation could be housed properly in council houses that are sitting

empty. Yes, we need some more help to tackle this long term but the Council needs to use the resources and the policy levers in has to fix the issues which are creating misery with far too many families.”

## What does a housing emergency mean?

The administration made the declaration to make the case for fairer funding from the Scottish and UK Governments. It is a constant cry from the minority Labour administration that Edinburgh is an underfunded council.

Cllr Meagher said: “We’re not talking about disproportionate funding, we’re talking about fairer funding and recognising the unique position that the Scottish capital is in in relation to our housing crisis. We will also be taking measures to accelerate what we already do to make a difference.”

The motion was passed with 51 votes cast in favour of the declaration and 9 cast for the Conservative group **addendum**. We asked Cllr Iain Whyte what this meant – and found that his political group did support the move but had wanted to add some extra parts to it as they are of the view that the Scottish Government rent cap is making rent inflation worse for private tenants.

Cllr Whyte said: “We added a small paragraph – added – we didn’t take anything away from the administration motion. It was just that we were keen to highlight the fact that the Scottish Government’s rent cap is tightening up the private rental market.

“There was nothing in what was being asked for, that we disagreed with, we just feel that are more ways that we can encourage greater supply to be available for those who need to rent and greater supply as we do in a market will reduce prices and help everyone.”

Speaking to the Housing Convener after the Council meeting. The situation all over Scotland has become problematic in recent years with more people requiring temporary accommodation, and more people living in unsuitable temporary accommodation. In addition the council as well as other social housing landlords face rising costs when it plans to build new council housing. Argyll and Bute declared a housing emergency in June.

Alison Watson, Director of Shelter Scotland, said that the move by the council is “an important moment for the fight against housing injustice in Edinburgh”. She continued: “Shelter Scotland is ready and willing to work with the council and other stakeholders to prepare an action plan following the declaration.”

Following the decision Ms Watson said: “

Shelter Scotland Director, Alison Watson, said: “Scotland is facing a housing emergency, which is at its most acute in the capital.

“By acknowledging the reality of the housing emergency in Edinburgh, councillors now have licence to deliver the emergency response we need.

“There was an enormous breadth of support for today’s declaration from organisations working in housing, homelessness, and social justice in Edinburgh.

“People in Edinburgh are struggling through this housing emergency, and they expect action to be taken at every level of government.

“With councillors having committed to delivering a housing emergency action plan, Shelter Scotland stands ready to work with the council in its development.

“Councillors have taken a positive step today, but this is

just the beginning of a journey which must ultimately lead to the end of the housing emergency in Edinburgh.”

Ms Watson said last week that government ministers have their heads in the sand on homelessness. The government just published its [Ending Homelessness Together annual report](#). Shelter has campaigned for the government to declare a housing emergency backed with a comprehensive action plan to “fix the country’s broken and biased housing system”.

Ms Watson said: “An emergency situation demands an emergency response, but this report suggests ministers still have their heads in the sand.

“It looks back on a year in which The Scottish Government has overseen a huge increase in the number of people becoming homeless, when the number of kids stuck in temporary accommodation hit record levels, and it offers no indication that next year will be any better.

“It celebrates the housing minister ‘raising public awareness’ of homelessness – we are well beyond the point where that’s something worthy of applause.

“His job isn’t to raise awareness of homelessness; his job is to end it.

“Across Scotland people are suffering through this housing emergency, this report is a harsh reminder that their government don’t understand what they’re going through and aren’t prepared to take action to fix it.

“We don’t need more well-meaning tweets from politicians and government; we need to see a concrete plan for immediate action.”

But Housing Minister Paul McLennan said that The Scottish Government has already allocated £3.5 billion during this parliamentary term which could provide 110,000 affordable

homes by 2032 and 70% of those will be for social rent.

## **The Scottish Parliament**

Scottish Labour Lothians MSP Sarah Boyack today called on The Scottish Government to provide targeted and substantial resource to fix Edinburgh's housing Crisis.

In anticipation of The City of Edinburgh Council declaring that Edinburgh is facing a housing crisis, Ms Boyack asked the First Minister to provide the resources and funding needed to fix Edinburgh's broken housing market.

She said afterwards: "Humza Yousaf's empty words at FMQs do nothing to alleviate the concern of the 5000 families living in temporary accommodation here in Edinburgh."

"With rents skyrocketing and families being forced out of Edinburgh the SNP Government has presided over a national failure in housebuilding"

"We need more affordable and social housing in Edinburgh, and with 84% of Scotland's population growth being concentrated in the Lothians we urgently need the funding to address Edinburgh's housing crisis."

## **MOTION**

Motion lodged in the name of Cllr Jane Meagher the Housing Convener:

"Council acknowledges Shelter Scotland's call to declare a Housing Emergency by both Devolved and Local Authorities. In response, Council notes:

The acute nature of Edinburgh's homelessness crisis, with approximately 5,000 households in temporary accommodation, the highest number in Scotland.

The severe shortage of social rented homes, with approximately 200 bids for each property advertised through Edindex and additional pressures for accessible and family homes.

The increasing pressure within the private rental sector, with the highest rental inflation in the United Kingdom at 13.7%

This is despite the range of Council efforts to tackle structural

pressures including, but not limited to:

The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan

Development of an Affordable Housing Policy

Development of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan

Lobbying Scottish government for additional, and targeted, funding

Council notes the importance of collaborative working, and further

notes the importance of engaging with tenants' organisations and

third sector groups involved with homelessness support in order

to take a human rights-based approach to future work.

Council, therefore, agrees to declare a Housing Emergency; agreeing to work with, Council Officers, existing third sector partners, external organisations such as SHAPE, Shelter Scotland and Cyrenians, with the goal of establishing a Housing

Emergency Action Plan to build on and consolidate existing actions.

Requests progress monitoring regarding the efficacy of the Housing Emergency Action Plan comes to the Housing, Homelessness, and Fair Work Committee through regular updates.

Requests that the council leader writes to the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister, the housing minister, and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, outlining the actions council is taking to address the housing emergency, and seeks additional resources to help meet the severe challenges.”



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